



Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service

Strategic Plan (2003 – 2008)

Updated February 2006

Introduction.....	3
Protection System	5
Key Challenges.....	7
Strategic Mission Priorities	9
Management Priorities	123

Introduction

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is an action-oriented agency that works with other Federal agencies, Congress, the States, tribes, foreign governments, agricultural interests, and the general public to carry out its mission:

To protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources.

The APHIS mission, goals and strategies are consistent with the USDA's Strategic Plan 2002 to 2007. See Goal 3: Enhance Protection and Safety of the Nation's Agriculture and Food Supply. (See <http://www.usda.gov/ocfo/usdasp/pdf/sp02-05.pdf>)

APHIS uses its umbrella of protection, as depicted in Figure 1, to assure its customers and stakeholders that it is on guard against the introduction or re-emergence of animal and plant pests and diseases that could limit production and damage export markets. At the same time, APHIS also monitors and responds to potential acts of agricultural bioterrorism, invasive species, diseases of wildlife and livestock, and conflicts between humans and wildlife.

APHIS' Mission:

To protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources

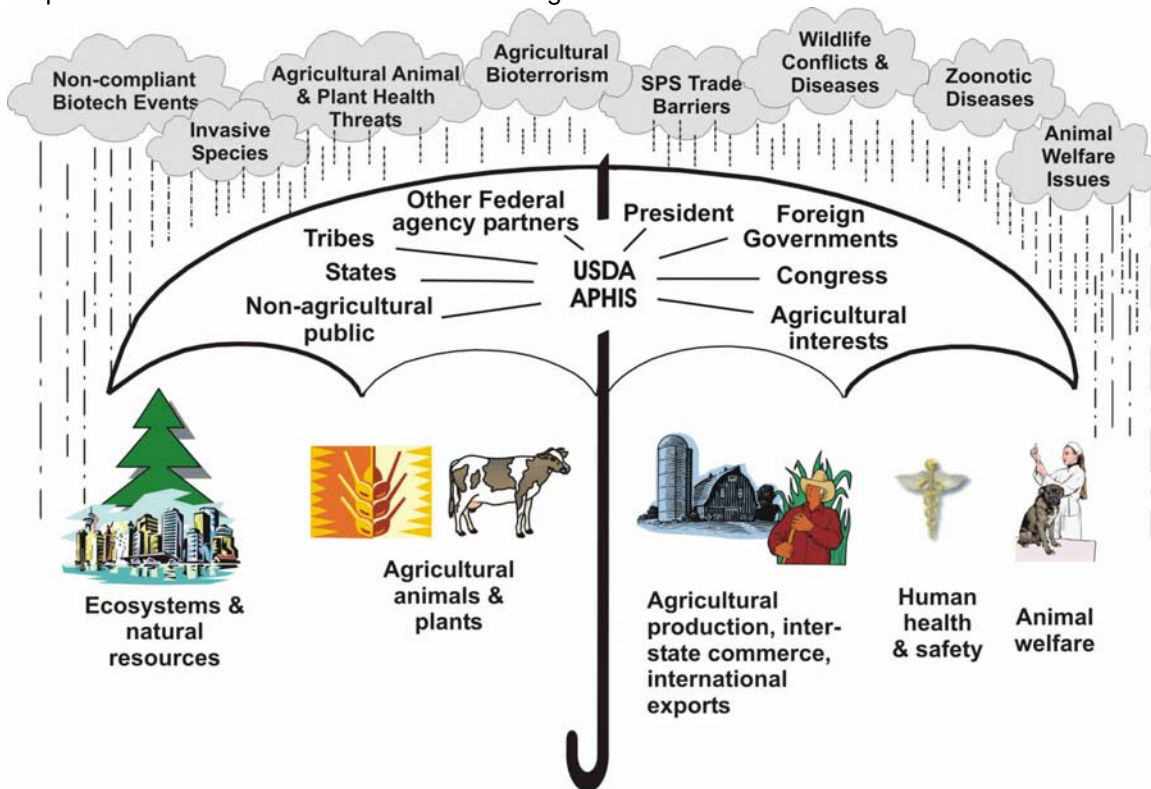


Figure 1

APHIS also addresses sanitary and phytosanitary trade barriers and certain issues related to the humane treatment of animals. Finally, APHIS ensures that biotechnology-derived agricultural products are safe for release into the environment. As of January 2006, APHIS employed 8,400 people with a wide range of scientific, technical, and administrative skills working in all 50 states, several territories and some 25 countries around the world. The workforce is organized into six operational program units, three management support units, the Office of Civil Rights, and a new Office for Emergency Management and Homeland Security. APHIS will spend over \$1.34 billion in fiscal year 2005 to carry out its mission. The bulk of the Agency's funding comes from Congressional appropriations. APHIS also receives funding through other sources, including user fees, cooperative agreements, and international trust fund arrangements.

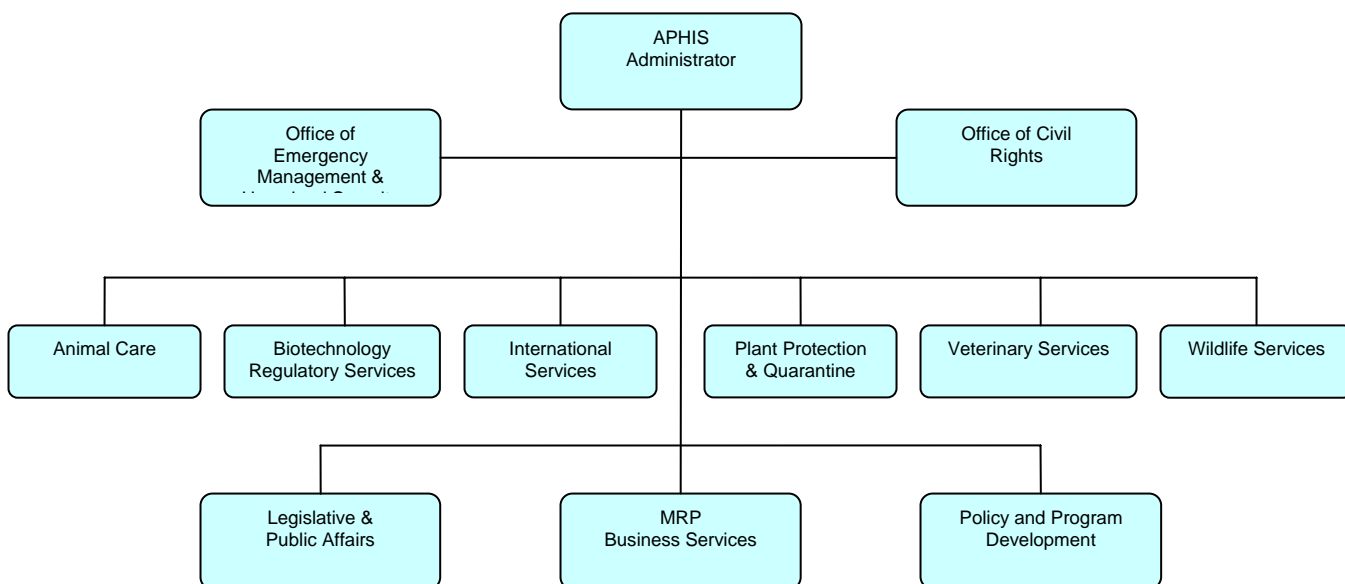


Figure 2

Protection System

All APHIS mission activities are carried out under the provisions of specific Federal laws. Several recent acts of Congress, including the Plant Protection Act (2000), the Animal Health Protection Act (2002), and the Public Health Security and Bioterrorism Preparedness Act (2002), have expanded the scope of APHIS' mission and provided additional protective responsibilities.

A key to APHIS' overall success has been the way each operational unit has successfully met the expectations of its main agricultural stakeholders. To continue to meet these expectations, program resources will need to be allocated and shared to maximize the potential for the success of APHIS' overall protection system. This system is a collection of **interdependent objectives** forming a **wheel of protection** against a variety of threats (see Figure 3).

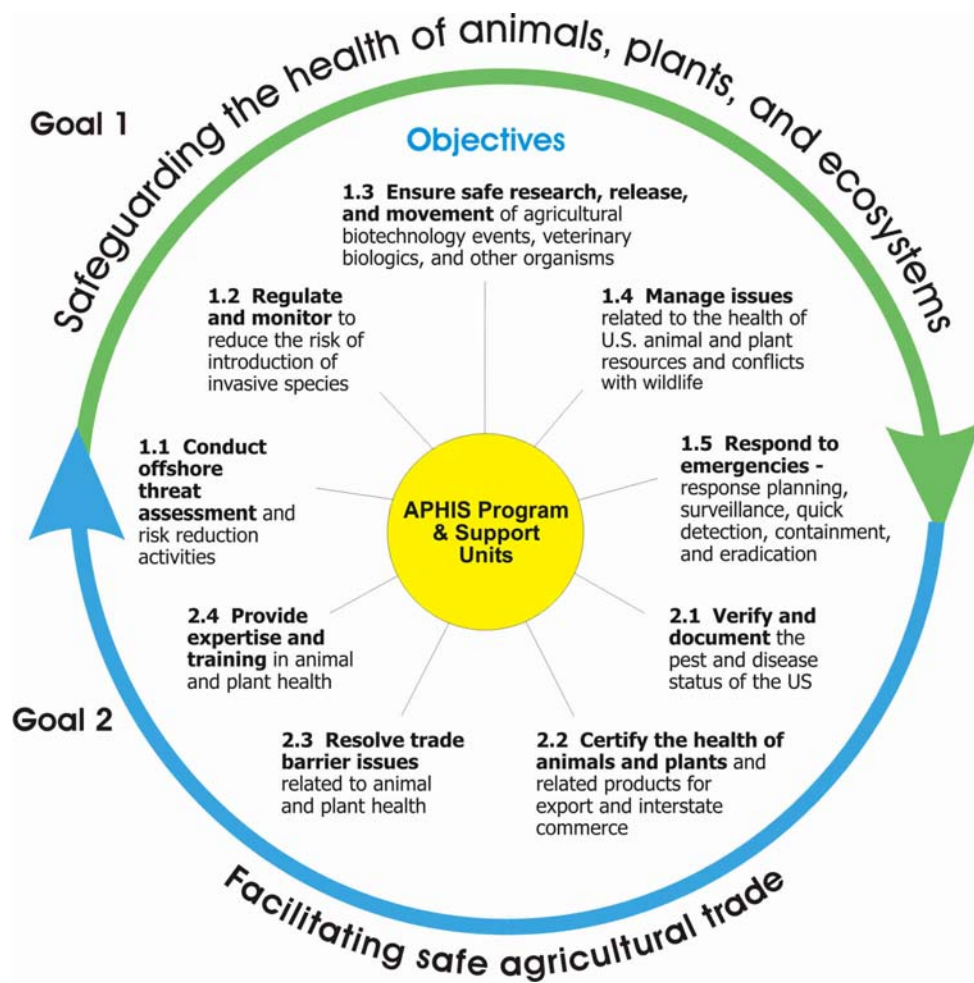


Figure 3

The system is based on a strategic premise that *safeguarding the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems makes safe agricultural trade possible and reduces losses to agricultural and natural resources*. One weak spoke can threaten our capability to protect the health and value of American agriculture and natural resources.

APHIS has built its strategic plan around this system of interdependent objectives. APHIS will carry out its programs to achieve two main mission-oriented goals and a management goal over the next five years:

- Goal 1. Safeguard the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems in the United States
- Goal 2. Facilitate safe agricultural trade
- Goal 3. Ensure the effective and efficient management of programs to achieve APHIS' mission

The goals and strategies of APHIS' current strategic plan are not significantly different from previous plans. What is new, however, is that APHIS is being ***more specific about approaching its protection activities as a system of interdependent strategies***.

Key Challenges

Although APHIS' human and financial resources and legal authorities are considerable, the Agency faces several significant challenges to maintain its umbrella of protection and achieve its mission.

Globalization, free trade agreements, and transportation technologies have increased the risk of introduction of exotic invasive species. A key APHIS protection strategy has been to regulate and inspect imports of agricultural products most likely to be carrying exotic animal and plant pests and diseases. Under the recent free trade agreements and presidential initiatives, there has been a substantial increase in the numbers of requests for imports into this country. This has placed an added burden on APHIS to continue to ensure scientific rigor in its assessment of potential health threats, avoiding unnecessary restrictions to trade.

Along with this increase in import requests has come an increase in requests from other countries for technical assistance. These are requests to help foreign countries build animal and plant health infrastructure and capacity to deal with pest and disease issues and biotechnology issues that threaten not only their own countries' plant and animal health but also threaten trade with other countries including the US. The increase in requests for technical assistance challenges the Agency's resources and requires that we respond strategically by balancing animal and plant health risk, international trade concerns, and the need to participate in Federal initiatives to help specific regions or countries around the world.

APHIS is also facing the potential for increased biotechnology regulatory activities. Most of the international work of Biotechnology and Regulatory Services has focused on two main areas -- standard setting and capacity building. Countries are now beginning to inquire about importing biotechnology-derived products. Designing import regulations for biotechnology is imminent.

At the same time that APHIS is developing regulations for imports, other agricultural stakeholders ask APHIS to ensure that U.S. agricultural exports are unimpeded by the sanitary or phytosanitary (SPS) regulations of trading partners. A key challenge for APHIS is to serve as a leader in international arenas where SPS standards are being developed and applied, and where priorities are set for capacity building efforts.

The President has issued a series of directives which outline policies that help implement the Homeland Security Act of 2002. HSPD-9, Defense of U.S. Agriculture and Food, calls upon the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and APHIS in particular, to establish a national policy to defend the United States agriculture and food system from terrorist attacks, natural disasters, incursions of animal and plant pests and diseases, zoonotic diseases and other emergencies. APHIS will play a leadership role by building upon and expanding current monitoring and surveillance programs, including national and international information, to support early detection and awareness of threats to animal and plant resources, including wildlife disease threats.

APHIS will coordinate with Congress and other governmental entities such as DHS, HHS, EPA, and DOI to achieve these homeland security goals. Challenges include such initiatives as creating a new biological threat awareness capacity and developing mitigation strategies for vulnerabilities at critical production and processing nodes.

APHIS also faces challenges with respect to enhancing, integrating and protecting its science and technology infrastructure. First, APHIS will play a key role in integrating current laboratory resources into a nationwide laboratory network for veterinary and plant health, utilizing federal and state resources and standardizing diagnostic protocols and procedures. Secondly, APHIS will work in concert with HHS/CDC and DOJ to develop and

implement processes and procedures to monitor and track the possession and use of select agents and toxins. As we have learned in responding collaboratively to emergencies, the American public has come to expect a single face of government and its programs. We are not only challenged to continue to develop and operate our programs collaboratively but to do it in a more seamless way. We need to be part of a unified culture within APHIS, with our sister agencies in the USDA and across the Federal government. That collaborative and seamless approach must continue to extend to State, local and Tribal governments as well.

The National Response Plan (NRP) completed in 2005 not only codifies APHIS as the primary agency responsible for responding to animal and plant disease and pest emergencies but also raises the expectation that we will help in responding to other emergencies in which our expertise could be used. Not only does the NRP officially raise these expectations, but as we interact with new partners and stakeholders, and we become involved in new areas, there is an increasing demand on Agency services. This includes but is not limited to our efforts in emergency animal rescue and care, carcass disposal and others.

In all of these efforts, and others related to emergency preparedness, response, and recovery APHIS is challenged to communicate and coordinate efforts throughout the security community in such a way that its own employees and its partners clearly understand their roles and responsibilities and have at their disposal the resources they need to quickly and effectively respond to emergencies.

While APHIS must make adjustments to ensure it continues to respond effectively to the needs of traditional agricultural constituencies, the Nation expects the Agency's scientific, technical, and regulatory expertise and authorities to address many other important protection issues. APHIS will also be challenged to attract and retain the scientific and technical expertise needed to meet these challenges.

APHIS must meet the challenge to be as responsive to the needs of its employees as it is to the needs of external stakeholder groups. APHIS employees must have the skills, experiences, and resources they need to accomplish all of the other mission priorities. After all, it is the agency's mission-focused employees who are responsible for the success of the Agency.

Strategic Mission Priorities

As part of its new strategic direction, APHIS intends to strengthen key components of its protection system by focusing on the following mission objectives (not necessarily in any particular priority order):

1. Ensuring the safe research, release, and movement of agricultural biotechnology

In order for U.S. agriculture to take advantage of the tremendous potential of this technology, APHIS must ensure that national and international stakeholders and the global public have full confidence in its safety. To ensure confidence, we regulate both plant and animal biotechnology with appropriate rigor based on a combination of risk and scientific familiarity. This involves updating Agency regulations and oversight procedures to rigorously address advances in the technology and the risks posed by those advances and allowing lighter regulation and oversight when our experience and familiarity with the safety of certain products or classes of products indicates.

Internally, APHIS will continue to strengthen its scientific risk analysis capability, ensuring that the best science is available to support regulatory development and decision making. We will continue to encourage compliance with our regulations, backing that encouragement with strong enforcement through enhanced inspection and auditing functions. We will develop regulations and oversight procedures, build scientific capacity and enforcement capability openly and transparently as a way to engage and involve the public and interested stakeholders in these processes. We will expand its international presence, leveraging overseas APHIS presence to support the biotechnology regulatory mission, building global regulatory capacity and ensuring the continued development of consistent international standards.

2. Strengthening emergency and homeland security preparedness and response

With the heightened concerns about potential bioterrorism and related threats to our national security, the APHIS emergency management system will be expanded to include the full range of potential threats including natural disasters and terrorist attacks. The overall system of preparedness and response focuses on protecting animal and plant health from both intentional and accidental introductions of pests and diseases and includes protection for the critical animal and plant health infrastructure and animal welfare that supports American agriculture and our food supply.

The Agency is committed to working with DHS and other partners on vulnerability assessments and mitigation strategies and to working with the Department of Health and Human Services to enforce the Agricultural Bioterrorism Act. There are two components of the emergency and homeland security preparedness and response system:

A. Nationally-Coordinated Pest and Disease Surveillance and Detection Systems

APHIS will continue building our internal technical diagnostic capability and leadership as we further involve Federal, State, academic, and industry resources in strengthening its comprehensive, coordinated and integrated surveillance and detection system. We will broaden our diagnostic capability by supporting the National Animal Health Laboratory Network and the National Plant Diagnostic Network. We will improve our ability to track livestock movement through the implementation of the National Animal Identification System.

B. Animal and Plant Health Emergency Response Systems

APHIS will ensure that resources are strengthened, combined (Federal, State, Local, and Industry) and coordinated to respond to emergencies effectively and efficiently. All APHIS employees are committed to supporting our emergency response efforts. We will continue to enhance our ability to prepare for and respond to all emergencies through the implementation of the National Response Plan, National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System.

3. Resolving trade barrier issues related to sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) issues

APHIS already puts a heavy emphasis on resolving SPS issues, but the Agency is making an even greater push to find ways to help resolve these issues, which have been identified as one of USDA's highest program priorities for enhancing agricultural exports. APHIS will increase the use of several tactics to achieve this priority:

A. Resolve issues through relationship building

When an issue arises overseas regarding a specific shipment, our APHIS attachés are on the spot to resolve those specific issues. The attachés have been effective because they work to build relationships with their foreign counterparts and are able to navigate the complex systems, relationships, and cultures that exist in foreign countries.

B. Developing coalitions for U.S. policies and positions

Resolving trade disputes can often be accomplished at international standard-setting bodies such as the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE), International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC), and CODEX. To ensure these bodies adopt U.S. positions on agricultural trade issues, APHIS must build coalitions that support scientific standards upon which sanitary and phytosanitary issues can be more easily resolved.

C. Streamline APHIS risk assessment and regulatory processes to allow trade of safe food and agricultural products

There is a large and growing backlog of requests for the importation of agricultural products into the U.S. The lack of timely progress on these requests has a chilling affect on our ability to export. The Federal Government's risk assessment and regulatory processes are seen as an obstacle to more timely consideration of import requests. APHIS is establishing regulatory and SPS priorities, promulgating broader rules, streamlining its processes, utilizing information technology and adding analytical resources to expedite decision-making related to import requests.

D. Communicating the scientific and technical basis for the APHIS biotechnology regulatory framework

Through work in international standard setting organizations and capacity building activities with individual countries and regional organizations, APHIS averts trade disputes by ensuring that trading partners understand the importance of deploying a science-based system for safety reviews, and that regulatory actions are consistent with scientific principles. When trade disputes do arise, APHIS scientists are available to articulate the scientific and technical basis of any relevant regulatory decisions made on the agricultural products in question.

4. Reducing domestic threats through increased offshore threat assessment and risk-reduction activities

The globalization of agriculture makes it necessary for APHIS to develop and implement programs that identify health threats outside our borders and reduce those threats at the source. The APHIS Management Team identified four offshore activities to emphasize in coming years:

- A. Build an international plant and animal pest, disease, and pathway information system that will feed into the domestic surveillance and detection system.
- B. Eradicate specific exotic pests and diseases that continue to be reintroduced in the United States causing emergency situations or that otherwise pose a clear, immediate danger of being introduced.
- C. Take steps to mitigate specific offshore threats such as screwworm and medfly.
- D. Provide training and technology transfer for developing countries to build their animal and plant health infrastructures and thus reduce the likelihood of undetected threat pathways into the United States.

5. Managing domestic and international issues related to the health of U.S. animal and plant resources and conflicts with wildlife

Although APHIS will continue to manage a wide variety of domestic and international programs to protect the interests of traditional agricultural stakeholders, the agency will focus on programs to address:

- A. Wildlife issues: We will expand wildlife disease and invasive species control programs and increase our emphasis on research in these areas. APHIS and its stakeholders have become aware of the need to pay more attention to wildlife diseases—particularly those that are transmissible to humans and domestic livestock—and invasive species that impact ecosystems. APHIS' National Wildlife Research Center will continue to expand its research into these areas. This research has important implications for APHIS emergency preparedness initiatives. APHIS will continue to partner with the Federal Aviation Administration to work with managers of the country's airports to minimize the risks wildlife pose to the safety of the public and the aviation industry.
- B. Education and outreach: Emphasize outreach and education as a strategy to assure the humane welfare and treatment of animals as well as success of animal health, plant health, and wildlife damage management.
- C. Certification, Auditing and Accreditation approaches: Develop innovative and expanded uses of certification, auditing, and accreditation approaches. Inspection and compliance monitoring are functions that facilitate international and interstate trade and safeguard animal and plant health.

6. Value and invest in APHIS employees

All of these strategic priorities are possible only because of the Agency's dedicated, knowledgeable, skilled and diverse workforce. APHIS is committed to:

- A. Effective workforce planning to ensure that the right numbers and kinds of employees continue to be in place to do the job
- B. Creating a work environment in which employees are actively involved and have what they need to do their jobs including:

- 1) Effective management and leadership
- 2) Clearly communicated information about expectations, direction and priorities
- 3) Developmental opportunities to gain needed skills and knowledge
- 4) Feedback on work done that includes rewards and recognition as appropriate
- 5) Human Resource policies that recognize the Agency's critical responsibilities and employees' personal needs

Management Priorities

In addition to the mission priorities, APHIS will implement the following management initiatives to fulfill the President's Management Agenda and APHIS Goal 3: *Ensure the effective and efficient management of programs to achieve APHIS' mission:*

- A. Implement the APHIS operational plan
 - 1. Improve management of the Agency's regulatory and SPS priorities
 - 2. Effectively manage high impact rulemaking
 - 3. Reach agreement on APHIS' role in regulatory framework for transgenic animals and arthropods
 - 4. Continue implementation of the National Animal Identification System
 - 5. Slow the global spread of Avian Influenza and prepare to respond domestically
 - 6. Continue building the National Animal Health Laboratory Network
 - 7. Continue building the National Veterinary Stockpile
 - 8. Maximize APHIS capacity to manage ESF-11
 - 9. Realign the International Services organization
 - 10. Complete development and implementation of plans to address fruit fly issues in Mexico
 - 11. Continue development of the Animal Care Risk Based Inspection System
 - 12. Manage citrus diseases
 - 13. Implement Rapid Rabies Immunohistochemical testing with Mexico and Canada
 - 14. Develop Agency Workforce/Succession plans
 - 15. Continue to implement initiatives to streamline the regulatory process
 - 16. Develop and implement initiatives to reduce EEO Complaints
 - 17. Reduce the Agency FOIA backlog
 - 18. Implement HSPD-12
 - 19. Implement the Integrated Acquisition System
 - 20. Implement the IT Portfolio Plan
 - 21. Implement the APHIS public web migration
 - 22. Implement the Cooperative Agreement Process Improvement initiatives

APHIS' Commitment

Throughout all of APHIS' planning for the future, one thing remains clear: the mandate for the future of APHIS is protection and safeguarding America's borders. It is ensuring that the health of America's agriculture is not compromised. Although the processes by which the Agency protects America's healthy and diverse food supply are increasingly challenged, APHIS is committed to taking the lead in building and maintaining a world-class protection system that safeguards the health of animals, plants, and ecosystems in the United States and fosters safe agricultural trade worldwide.